

NOVEMBER 12, 1981

MEMORANDUM

TO: BOSTON REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

FROM: ROBERT J. RYAN, DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: BOYLSTON BUILDING REDEVELOPMENT - PARCEL 31
THEATER DISTRICT

The redevelopment and rehabilitation of the Boylston Building by the Chinese Economic Development Council, Inc. is critical to the economic development of the lower Washington Street, Chinatown area. This project has moved forward recently with the award of a \$2. million grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration and a \$1. 113,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

On 14 September 1981, the Chinese Economic Development Council prepared a Final Application and Redevelopment Plan requesting a \$2. million loan from the Massachusetts Government Land Bank in support of land acquisition, relocation and development supervision activities. Land Bank participation in the project will allow the structuring of a viable financial package which allow the Chinese Economic Development Council to move forward with a program that will result in the creation of approximately 250 new jobs for neighborhood residents which will be brought about by the primary occupancy of the Boylston Building by Wang Laboratories, Inc.

In order for the Government Land Bank to make a final approval of the submitted Application and Redevelopment Plan, two votes are required by the Boston Redevelopment Authority and City Council. These votes are as follows:

1. A determination that the property is blighted, open, decadent, or sub-standard, and:
2. Approval of the Final Application and Redevelopment Plan.

To further facilitate the successful redevelopment of the Boylston Building and the adjacent property which is in the planning stage, it is recommended that Section A, of the the Park Plaza Urban Renewal Plan, as Amended May, 1977, be amended by deleting the last paragraph of said Section so that the development of the Boylston Building will continue to be governed by the controls and restrictions of the Plan.

As evidence of the Authority's continuing commitment to this project, the following votes are offered:

VOTED: That the Boylston Building is blighted, open, decadent, or substandard; and

VOTED: That the Final Application and Redevelopment Plan prepared by the Chinese Economic Development Council, Inc. and submitted to the Massachusetts Government Land Bank for a two million dollar (\$2,000,000) loan in support of acquisition, relocation and development activities is approved; and that the Authority hereby approves a minor modification to the Park Plaza Urban Renewal Plan deleting the last paragraph of Section A of said Plan as most recently amended May 1977, so that the development of the Boylston Building will continue to be governed by the controls and restrictions of the Plan.

INTER-OFFICE COMMUNICATION

TO Robert J. Ryan, Director
FROM Bill Condo
DATE October 19, 1981
SUBJECT BOYLSTON BUILDING

The attached material relates to City actions required to fulfill Government Land Bank regulations concerning assistance in the redevelopment of the Boylston Building.

You will note that the proposed blight determination, prepared by Land Bank staff for their Board, basically consists of BRA data. Since this, most recent data reflects the continuing levels of disinvestment and blight in the general area and, with the Boylston Building specifically, the process of redesignating Parcel 31 an Urban Renewal area could be facilitated by the various governmental actions for this project.

I am presently awaiting word from Byron Matthew's office on what criterion needs to be met to gain a favorable response on this redesignation from the State.

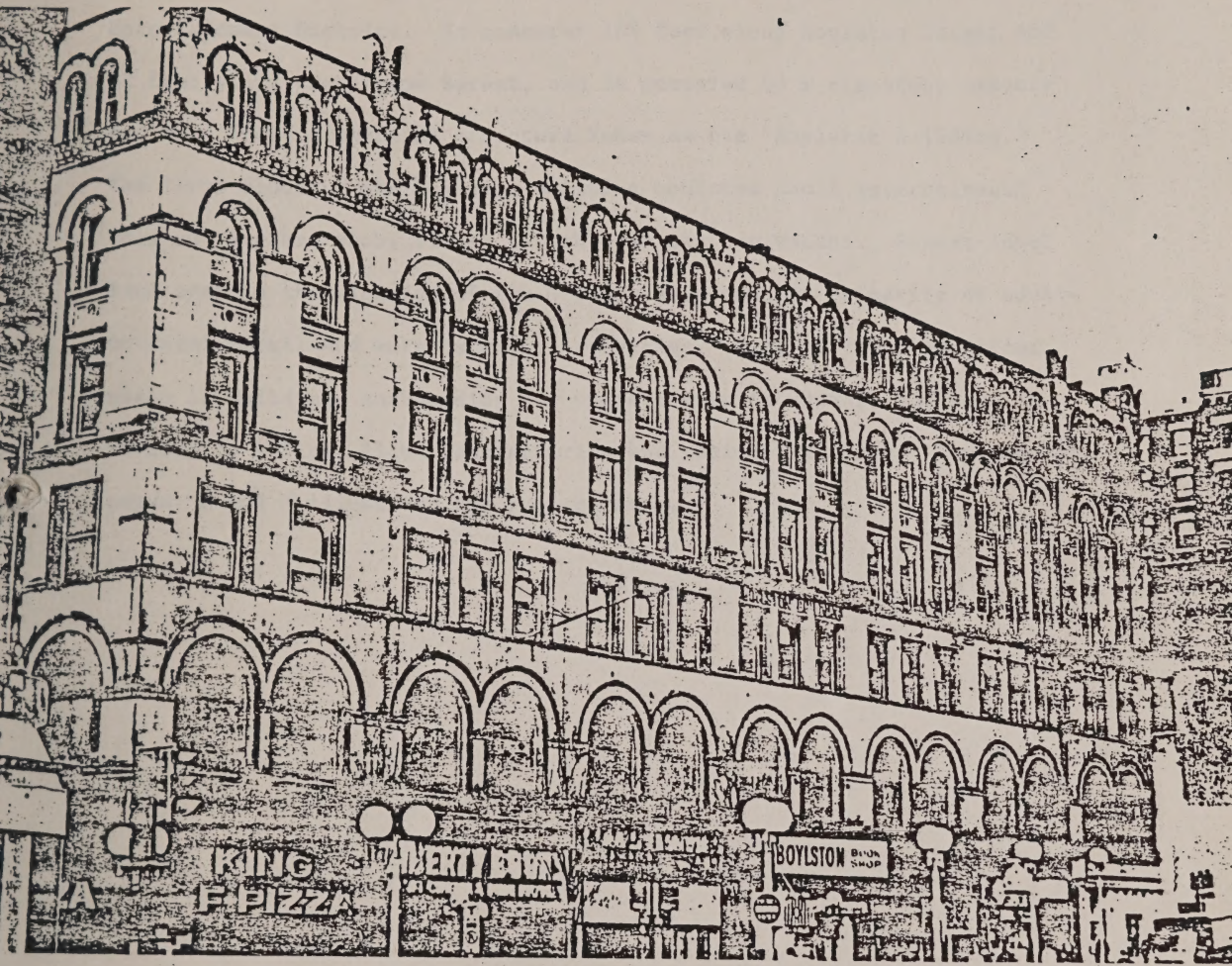
cc: Paul McCann
Dick Garver
Harry Stoddard

PROPOSED DETERMINATION
OF DECADENT OR BLIGHTED OPEN CONDITIONS
BOYLSTON BUILDING
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Staff Report
Massachusetts Government Land Bank
19 January 1981

Recommendation: The Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Government Land Bank determines that the project area located at the southwest corner of the intersection of Washington, Boylston and Essex Streets in Boston's Adult Entertainment District, which is described on page 3 and identified on the maps on pages 4 and 5, is a decadent area which is detrimental to the health, safety, morals, welfare and sound growth of the City of Boston. This determination is based on the following proposed findings:

- 1) The existing building on the site -- the Boylston Building -- is physically deteriorated, out of repair, in need of major maintenance, and obsolete.
- 2) The area of the City in which the Boylston Building is located has experienced a substantial change in business and economic conditions and is characterized by excessive land coverage, diversity of ownership, irregular lot sizes and obsolete street patterns, making it improbable that the area will be redeveloped by the ordinary operations of private enterprise.



THE BOYLSTON BUILDING

Location: The project area is located at the southwest corner of the intersection of Washington, Boylston, and Essex Streets in Boston's Adult Entertainment District. It measures 188 feet along Boylston Street and 82 feet along Washington Street, and is occupied by a six-story masonry and iron frame commercial structure known as the "Boylston Building." The first floor of the Boylston Building contains adult entertainment uses and a pizza shop; floors two through six are vacant. Street-level land uses in the vicinity of the project area consist primarily of adult-oriented retail and entertainment activities. Most of the upper floor space in buildings surrounding the project area is vacant, but some is devoted to office, light manufacturing and residential uses. The maps on pages 4 and 5 illustrate the project area.



Boylston Building

2-22 Boylston Street

Source: Boston Redevelopment Authority





Boylston Building

2-22 Boylston Street

Source: Boston Redevelopment Authority



Proposed Finding Number 1: The existing building on the site is physically deteriorated, out of repair, in need of major maintenance, and obsolete.

The Boylston Building is a six-story commercial building of mixed load-bearing masonry and iron frame construction faced with Nova Scotia sandstone. It was designed by Carl Fehmer, a noted Boston architect, and is a proto-commercial style with Renaissance and Romanesque detailing. Each floor is approximately 15,000 square feet in area, and interior column spacing provides for bays of about 14 by 25 feet.

The Boylston Market Association built the building in 1887 to replace the structure that previously stood on the site, the Boylston Market. It was designed for retail use on the ground floor and office or wholesale use on the upper floors -- a novel concept for the time.¹ Although the building has been in continuous use since it was built, the upper floors, which were previously used for furniture showrooms and office space, have been vacant since the early 1970's.² The ground floor, which was occupied by retail uses for most of the building's life, has been occupied primarily by adult entertainment uses since the mid-1970's.³

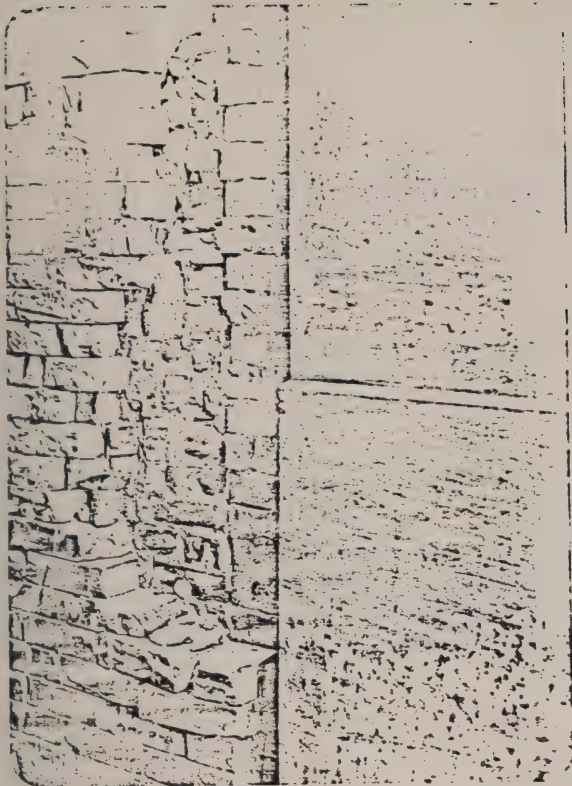
Like many of the buildings in the area of the City in which it is located, the Boylston Building has not been well maintained and, as a consequence, has physically deteriorated. Among the problems is the rear wall of the building, which needs major pointing and replacement of loose, missing and spalled brickwork. (See photographs 1, 2, 3.) The sandstone facing also needs selective pointing,⁵ and both the facing and the brickwork need cleaning.⁶ The roof and the basement floor need to be replaced.⁷ In addition, ceiling, floor and wall finishes are in poor condition, exhibiting water damage, cracked plaster and peeling paint. (See photograph 4.)

Because few capital improvements have been made since the time of construction, the building does not meet current fire, energy, electrical and plumbing codes.⁸ With regard to fire codes, shortcomings include the interior columns, which are non-fireproofed cast iron (see photograph 6); the fire stairs, which have combustible components and are too narrow; and the sprinkler system, which needs to be converted from a dry to a wet system.⁹ To meet energy codes, it will be necessary to insulate the roof, replace the existing windows, and lower and insulate the ceilings.¹⁰ To meet electrical codes it will be necessary to remove and replace the existing electrical system (see photograph 5), and to meet plumbing codes it will be necessary to remove and replace the existing plumbing.¹¹

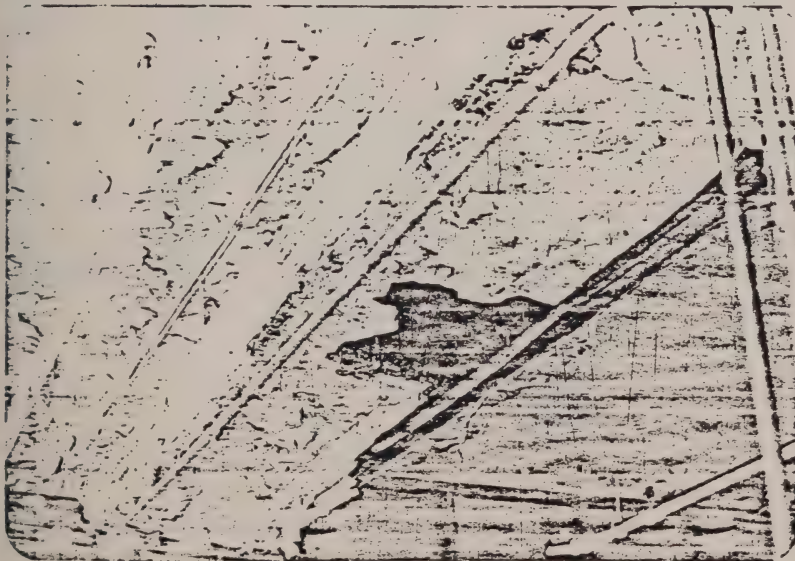
The Boylston building is currently unsuitable for either office or industrial use because it is functionally obsolete. Substantial improvements in the electrical and mechanical systems, the shipping facilities, and the interior floor layout and finishes would have to be undertaken to bring the building up to market standards. The existing wiring is inadequate, with exposed, uninsulated and redundant circuits. Interior lighting is generally insufficient, and in some areas is non-existent. The ventilating equipment that has been installed on some floors is inadequate in terms of volume, capacity, and fire safety. The two passenger elevators are too small and slow to service an office building, while the freight elevator could not handle the flow of products from an industrial user. Furthermore, there are virtually no truck docking facilities - only one 12' x 8' door opening onto an unsound wooden loading platform about 50 square feet in area. (See photograph 7.) The floors of the building are divided into innumerable cubicles in an inefficient and haphazard manner. To permit the flexible arrangement of space required by modern office users, these walls would have to be removed.

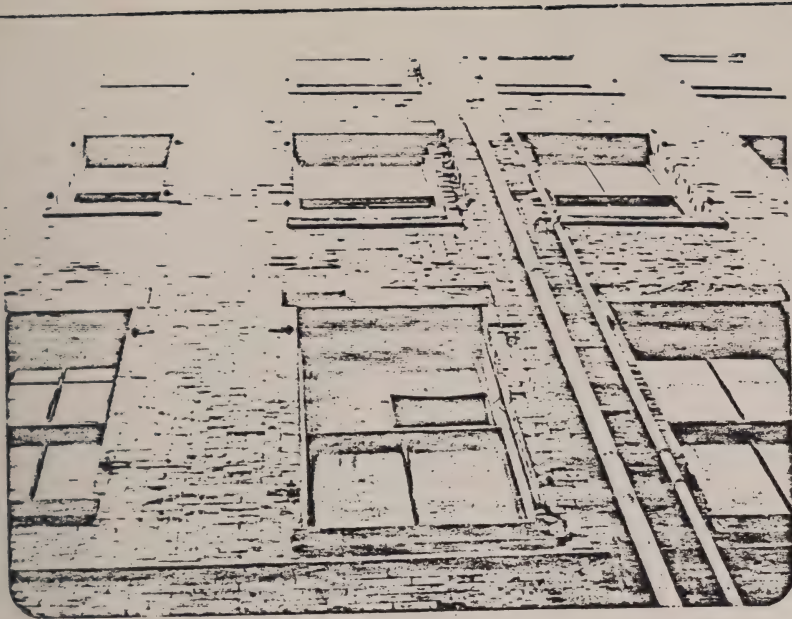
The bay size between columns makes use by industrial tenants difficult, since they typically demand wide, unencumbered spaces. Taken together, these conditions make the building uncompetitive with others in the market.

3. Missing brickwork behind sandstone facade.

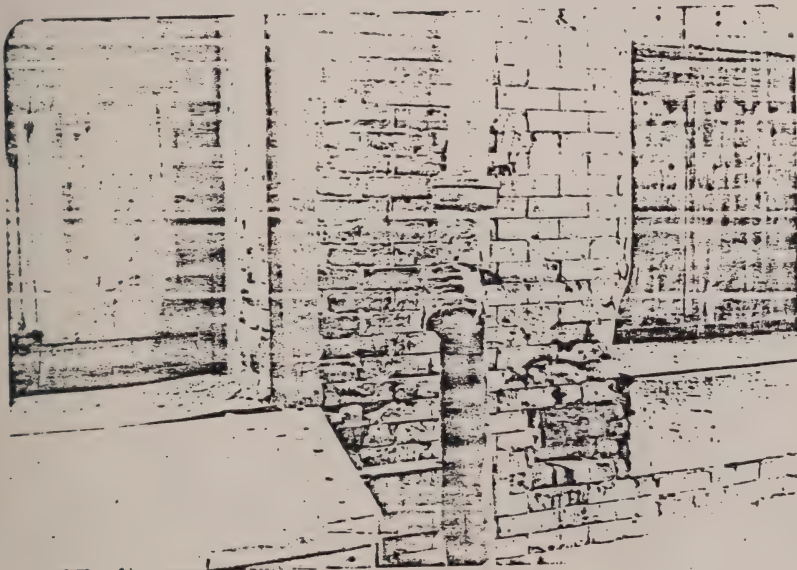


4. Water damaged, and decomposing plaster ceiling in top floor, due to leaking roof.



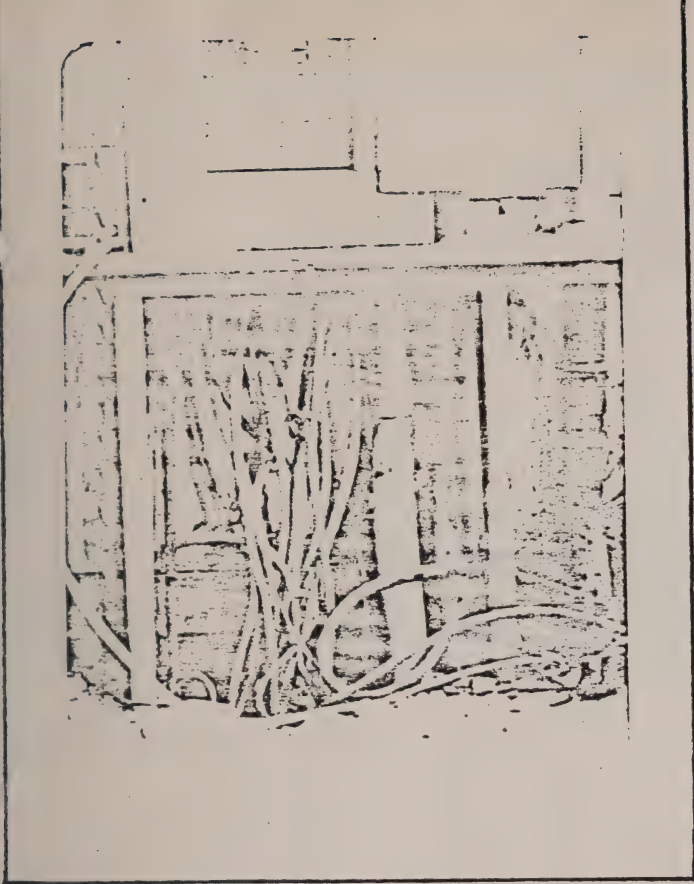


1. Missing and spalled brickwork at windows, rear of building.

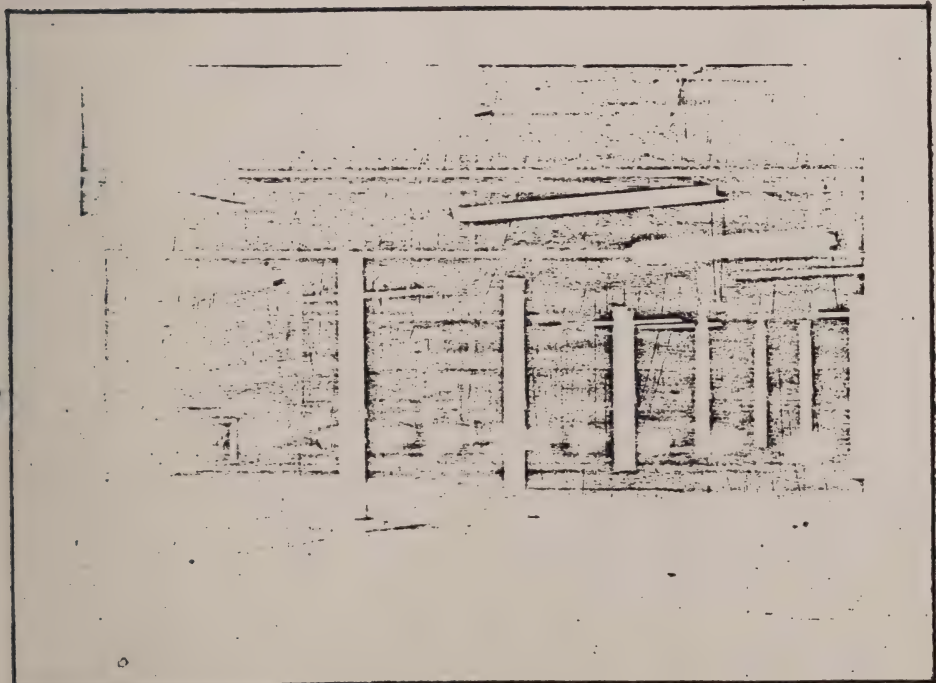


2. Missing and spalled brickwork at ground level, by loading facilities. Missing section of drain pipe from roof.

5. Typical corroded conduits and exposed wiring.



6. Closely spaced, non-fireproofed cast-iron columns typical throughout.





7. Existing docking facilities with small wooden platform.

Proposed Finding Number 2: The area of the City in which the Boylston Building is located has experienced a substantial change in business and economic conditions and is characterized by excessive land coverage, diversity of ownership, irregular lot sizes and obsolete street patterns, making it improbable that the area will be redeveloped by the ordinary operations of private enterprise.

The Boylston Building is located at the center of Boston's Theatre District, the area between the Back Bay and the Washington Street retail district (see map on page 14). In fact, the block bounded by Boylston, Washington, Stuart and Tremont Streets is often referred to as the "hinge block," since it constitutes a "hinge" between the retail/financial district to the north and the Back Bay to the west. In spite of its location, the Theatre District has not experienced the economic revitalization that has been realized in many other downtown areas.

Like much of downtown Boston, the Theatre District suffered a period of decline following World War II. Only three legitimate theatres remained in operation -- the Colonial, the Shubert, and the Wilbur -- all of which were owned by New York corporations. Major retail operations along Washington Street departed, the garment industry contracted, and surface parking lots and bus stations dominated the Park Square and Stuart Street areas. The redevelopment of Scollay Square eliminated one of Boston's "red-light" neighborhoods, but had the effect of further concentrating adult entertainment in the lower Washington Street area, which became known as the "Combat Zone." This situation was formalized in 1974, when the addition of the Adult Entertainment Zone to Boston's zoning code restricted adult entertainment activities in the City to an area a half block deep on both sides of lower Washington Street (see map on page 14).¹²

THEATRE & ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICT

Key

- Underway
- - - Proposed

Source: Boston Redevelopment Authority



The social problems that plague the Theatre District include crime, poverty, unemployment, drug abuse and overcrowding.¹³ Perhaps the most serious in terms of inhibiting private investment in the area is crime. As Table 1 indicates, almost 18,000 crimes were reported in the vicinity of the District during the last five years. In 1980, 3,891 crimes were reported -- an average of approximately 75 per week. Many of these were serious offenses such as armed robbery, assault and battery, rape, and automobile theft.¹⁴ As significant as the actual incidence of crime is the widespread perception that the area is one of the most crime-ridden in the City. For instance, the results of a recent survey indicate that the most important reason non-theatre-goers do not attend events in the District is that they consider it to be an "unsafe and dangerous area."¹⁵ To cite another example, a businessmen's group recently issued a statement which said that "the Zone is a hideout for every unpleasant and illegal activity that goes on (in the area)."¹⁶ This image and the problems that engender it act to deter private investment from the Theatre District.

TABLE 1

Reported Crimes in the Vicinity of the Theatre District

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number</u>
1976	4,115
1977	3,104
1978	3,346
1979	3,504
1980	<u>3,891</u>
	17,960

Source: Derived from information provided by the City of Boston Police Department, Office of Informational Services, January 16, 1981.

The dominant physical characteristics of the area are its congested land use pattern, its inefficient and inadequate street and sidewalk network, its high building vacancy rates, and its general deterioration. Of the approximately 30 acres in the Theatre District/Chinatown Commercial Area Revitalization District (CARD) (see map on page 17) not occupied by sidewalks, rights-of-way or pedestrian areas, 18.2 are devoted to commercial use, 4.2 to residential use, and 3.6 to parking. The remaining land is used for a variety of other purposes as indicated in Table 2. These 30 acres comprise 279 legal lots, an average of almost 10 per acre.¹⁷

TABLE 2

Land Use in the Theatre District/Chinatown Phase II CARD*

<u>Land Use</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>% Total</u>
Commercial	18.2	61
Residential	4.2	14
Parking	3.6	12
Manufacturing	1.5	5
Institutional	1.2	4
Vacant Buildings	0.9	3
Vacant Land	0.3	1
	<u>29.9</u>	<u>100</u>

*Excludes land devoted to sidewalks, rights-of-way, and pedestrian areas.

Source: Derived from Boston Redevelopment Authority, Theatre District/Chinatown Phase II CARD, October 1980, Section 4.0.

The street network in the Theatre District consists largely of irregular, narrow and substandard roadways which are insufficient to carry normal volumes of traffic through and within the area. Moreover, the streets do not form a coherent or regular system, so the movement of traffic can be improved only marginally through the use of signs and signals. Sidewalks in the area are also inadequate:



**THEATRE DISTRICT
CHINATOWN CARD**

 **ADULT ENTERTAINMENT
DISTRICT**

they are so narrow that pedestrians are often forced to walk on the street. This is unsafe for pedestrians as well as a hindrance to the movement of vehicular traffic.¹⁸

The Theatre District is also characterized by high building vacancy rates and general deterioration. In a recent survey, the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) found that 25 percent of the buildings in the area were more than 50 percent vacant, and another 16 percent of the area's buildings were from 10 to 50 percent vacant.¹⁹ Table 3 displays the results of this survey in greater detail. With regard to physical condition, the BRA found only 10 percent of the buildings in the District to be in good condition, while 90 percent were classified as being in either fair or poor condition (see Table 4).

TABLE 3

Building Vacancies in the Theatre District/Chinatown Phase II CARD

<u>Vacancy</u>	<u># of Buildings</u>	<u>% of Total</u>
0 - 10%	150	59%
0 - 50%	42	16%
50 -100%	<u>63</u>	<u>25%</u>
	255	100%

Source: Boston Redevelopment Authority, Theatre District/Chinatown Phase II CARD, October 1980.

TABLE 4

Building Condition in the Theatre District/Chinatown Phase II CARD

<u>Building Condition</u>	<u># of Buildings</u>	<u>% of Total</u>
Good	25	10%
Fair	172	67%
Poor	<u>58</u>	<u>23%</u>
	255	100%

Source: Boston Redevelopment Authority, Theatre District/Chinatown Phase II CARD, October 1980.

On three occasions the BRA has found the Central Business District Urban Renewal Area, which encompasses the Boylston Building, to be a "decadent, blighted, deteriorated, and deteriorating area."²⁰ This finding was first made in 1965, and was reaffirmed in 1967 and again in 1970. As the foregoing discussion makes clear, there are many reasons why this area still warrants such a designation.

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NOTES

1. Report of the Boston Landmarks Commission on the Potential Designation of the Boylston Building as a Landmark, November 30, 1977, unpagued.
2. Interview with Mike OBryon, Director of Business Development, Chinese Economic Development Council, December 22, 1980.
3. Ibid.
4. Letter from Robert McGilvray, Chief of Rehabilitation Section, Boston Redevelopment Authority, to Mike OBryon, September 27, 1980.
5. Ibid.
6. Letter from Fred A. Dobsen, Vice President of Volpe Construction, to Mike OBryon, September 25, 1980.
7. Interview with Fred A. Dobson, Vice President of Volpe Construction, December 23, 1980.
8. Interview with Mike OBryon.
9. Interview with Fred Dobson.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Information in this paragraph was drawn from Boston Redevelopment Authority, Theatre District/Chinatown Phase II CARD Plan, October 1980, Section 1.0; and Boston Redevelopment Authority, Boston's Theatre District: A Program for Revitalization, May 1979, p. 4.
13. Boston Redevelopment Authority, A Study of the Interrelationship of Social Planning with Economic Development with Boston's Theatre District, August 1980.
14. This information was derived from a computer printout provided by the City of Boston Police Department, Office of Informational Services, January 16, 1981.
15. Boston Redevelopment Authority, Boston's Theatre District: A Program for Revitalization, May 1979, p. 21.
16. Boston Redevelopment Authority, A Study of the Interrelationship of Social Planning with Economic Development with Boston's Theatre District, August 1980, p. 11
17. Boston Redevelopment Authority, Theatre District/Chinatown Phase II CARD Plan, October 1980, Section 4.0.

18. Information in this paragraph was drawn from pages 6 and 7 of a resolution of the Boston Redevelopment Authority, August 2, 1967, declaring the Park Plaza Urban Renewal Area to be a blighted, decadent, deteriorated and deteriorating area.
19. Boston Redevelopment Authority, Theatre District/Chinatown CARD Plan, October 1980, Section 4.0.
20. Resolution of the Boston Redevelopment Authority approving the Urban Renewal plan for the Park Plaza Project, July 15, 1971.

